

## Rajya Sabha supports banned Telangana channels

A debate on media freedom denounced the ban by MSOs in Telangana as unjustified. C.S.H.N.MURTHY outlines how members exposed the poor reasoning behind the ban.

Posted Saturday, Aug 09 19:54:19, 2014

The issue of taking off television channels *TV 9* and *ABN-Andhra Jyothi* by the MSOs (Multi System Operators) of Telangana came up in the Rajya Sabha on Friday as part of a debate on the 'situation arising from the repeated attempts to curb the independence of the media and the freedom of expression'.

Cutting across political ideologies, all the members, except the lone Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) MP Kesava Rao, unequivocally condemned the action of the MSOs as unlawful and unconstitutional.

The debate was initiated by Sujana Chowdary, MP for the TDP, Andhra Pradesh, who explained the circumstances leading to the unlawful ban on June 15, 2014, was helped, by the clandestine funding of the Telangana Chief Minister, K. Chandra Sekhara Rao.

A number of MPs from other States, along with Congress MPs from Telangana, criticized the MSOs' action as extra-constitutional. Varun Tez of the BJP said the ban appeared to be muzzling the media and if this trend continued, every channel which failed to conform to the opinions of the Telangana Chief Minister could be silenced.

Rapolu Ananda Bhaskar, Congress MP from Telangana, said that the ban by the MSOs came quite handy to the TRS to stifle voices in the media it found inconvenient.

Renuka Chowdary, Congress MP from Telangana, said that if the government found anything objectionable in the *TV 9* and *ABN-Andhra Jyothi* programmes, it had various remedies available to it. But adopting a devious method to coerce the channels into toeing the line proved that the government was at fault.

Subba Rami Reddy MP from Andhra Pradesh urged the Minister of Information and Broadcasting to intervene and resolve the issue. C.M. Ramesh, MP from the TDP in Andhra Pradesh, read out the relevant provisions of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India as well as the Cable Network Regulations Act 1994. He pointed out how sub-regulation 10 (2), which stipulates a quality of service in transmission (Standards of Quality of Service - Digital Addressable Cable TV Systems- Regulations, 2012; Regulatory frame work for DAS by TRAI) has been violated by the MSOs.

He said cable operators need to issue a 15 day notice if they do not wish to broadcast a particular channel to both its subscribers as well as the concerned television channel. In the present circumstances, the MSOs' action was arbitrary and against the provisions of the 1994 Act.

Kesava Rao, the lone MP from the TRS, the ruling Telangana party, defended the ban, saying that *TV 9* and *ABN-Andhra Jyothi* had broadcast highly objectionable content against the Chief Minister and against the people of Telangana.

He tried to pass a few CDs around the House and repeated some of the "abuse" in the programmes, prompting the deputy chairman to admonish him and expunge the remarks. In fact, all the members were taken aback at hearing such foul words and wondered whether the two channels could have really indulged in such offensive language.

To the best of my knowledge, one programme called the '*Bullet News*' (*TV 9*) was the issue. This is a political satire in which a female anchor first makes a statement which is then followed by a voice over and a film clip. When the Telangana State Legislature objected to this programme, *TV 9* immediately flashed its 'unconditional apologies' which it kept scrolling the entire day.

As for the *ABN-Andhra Jyothi*, the only objection raised was that during an interview '*Open heart with RK*', the Chief Minister designate KCR was referred to as 'Nuvvu' (you) not as 'Meeru' (which also means 'you' but is a more respectable word for 'Nuuvu' in Telugu tradition) by Radha Krishna, the Editor of the Channel. Except for these two examples, there seems to be no other cases of either of the two channels indulging in filthy language.

In fact, the *V 6* channel uses foul language in a programme called '*Maatakari Mangi*' (talkative Mangi). Use of slang is quite prevalent across all channels both in Telugu as well as in other languages, pointed out C.M. Ramesh, another TDP MP during the debate.

Kesav Rao was unable to explain how the TRS or the Telangana Government justified the action of the MSOs. He said that the MSOs of the united Andhra Pradesh had blocked two Telangana channels, *V 6* and *TN*, during the earlier Telangana agitation for giving the agitation too much coverage.

In fact more than *V 6* and *TN*, the Andhra television channels *TV 9* and *ABN-Andhra Jyothi*, besides *Eenadu*, *NTV*, and *TV 5* gave much longer and closer coverage of the Telangana agitation so the question of blocking these television channels has never been an issue; nor was it brought to the notice of the Governor or the chief minister at the time. In fact, there was no report to this effect in any of the print media including *Namaste Telangana*, the mouthpiece of the TRS.

Had this been true, there were a number of Congress MPs from Telangana who could have raised the issue either in the Lok Sabha or in

the Rajya Sabha but no one did. Given the Congress' support for the Telangana movement, there was no scope for the MSOs of Andhra Pradesh to boycott those channels without the party's support.

Kesava Rao made another unsubstantiated allegation in the House by saying that after watching the "abusive" programmes on TV 9 and *ABN-Andhra Jyothi*, the High Court had dismissed the petition of the latter.

It is true that the Associate Editor of *ABN-Andhra Jyothi* had earlier filed a writ petition in the High Court for the States of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. After hearing all the arguments, the High Court had ruled that an alternative remedy was available to the aggrieved *ABN-Andhra Jyothi* and that the channel should first seek redress there before coming to the court. The petition was disposed of for this reason, not because it had no merit.

All the members of the House who participated in the discussion asked the Information & Broadcasting Minister, Prakash Javadekar, to order the MSOs to restore the transmission of the two television channels.

Javadekar replied that he had already asked the Telangana government to restore the channels but its response had been to say that it had nothing to do with the MSOs' action. He assured the House that he would meet the MSOs at 5 pm on August 8 and direct them to restore the channels in the interest of media freedom. If they failed to do so, he would cancel their licences.

As part of a wider debate, many members observed that it was high time that the Press Council of India was empowered to deal with the brazen violations of the print media, especially the phenomenon of 'paid news', newspaper owners dictating to the editorial departments, and cross-ownerships establishing monopolies.

They regretted how 'paid news' has polluted election campaigns and how the corporatization of the media has turned content into a 'commodity' dominated by sex, violence, and crime. Almost all the members urged the government to bring in appropriate laws to replace the self-regulatory mechanism which had proved to be a failure.

Javadekar's response was that he shared these concerns and would look into what mechanism would be the best; he would see how he could give 'teeth' to the Press Council of India; he will discuss with the Information and Technology Department what could be done about the obnoxious, pornographic, and anti-social posts on social media; and he will endeavor to bring in appropriate curbs in the form of a law to prevent the misuse and abuse of social media.

**(C.S.H.N. Murthy, Ph.D, is a journalist and Professor in Mass Communication and Journalism. He can be contacted at: [cshnmurthy@yahoo.co.in](mailto:cshnmurthy@yahoo.co.in))**

## Related links

[Blacked out on a whim](#)

[When media threatens democracy](#)

[Abusive media vs angry legislature](#)

[Respect Telangana, or go off the air](#)

[1](#)



| [Print](#)

[Window Close](#)